



## A Sunny Party With a Serious Agenda

By **AMANDA GORDON** | August 28, 2008

When Betsy McCaughey is on her subject — reducing death from infections contracted in hospitals — she glows.

So at the recent fund-raising party for the organization she founded, the Committee to Reduce Infection Deaths, she held the crowd's attention with ease.

It helped that she was surrounded by sunflowers at Henry Buhl's Southampton home, where the party took place: giant ones planted in the ground, painted ones found on the glasses and pool cushions, and sculpture renditions in the front yard.

The sunny hostess and setting were, however, deceptive, because Ms. McCaughey is serious when it comes to hospital infections. The former lieutenant governor, who is an adjunct senior fellow at the Hudson Institute, marshaled personal anecdotes, research findings, and numbers to make her point to guests: More than 100,000 die annually from an infectious disease developed in a hospital — deaths that are almost entirely preventable if hospitals were to implement the proper hygiene procedures.

These procedures are not complicated: Ms. McCaughey has defined 15 requests patients can make. These include asking hospital staff and visitors to clean their hands; asking that stethoscopes be wiped with alcohol and, three to five days before surgery, bathing with chlorhexidine soap, which helps remove bacteria a patient may have on his skin.

Part of Ms. McCaughey's argument is that reducing and eliminating infection is actually profitable for hospitals. She cited a study at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center, in which the cost of infection was calculated at \$801,652. The cost of implementing hygiene improvements was calculated at \$35,281. The amount of money that could be saved by implementing the improvements: \$766,371.

To drive home the lack of frivolity of the event, guests didn't receive goody bags loaded with the usual samples of perfume, skin products, and chocolates. Rather, they received a Hospital Infection Prevention Kit (available on the organization's Web site, [www.hospitalinfection.org](http://www.hospitalinfection.org), for \$45). The kit, which made its debut at the event, is for patients to use before and during their hospital stay. Some of the items it contains are chlorhexidine soap, hand sanitizer, gloves, and foil-wrapped packages of bleach-soaked towels to remove bacteria from surfaces in the hospital room.

The event, which drew 60 guests, raised \$100,000, which will help fund new initiatives such as a DVD for first-year medical students, educating them on how to prevent bacteria from reaching their patients; laminated cards in several languages on how to clean effectively, to be distributed to hospital cleaning staffs, and a campaign to discourage medical professionals from wearing their hospital attire outside the hospital.